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ABSTRACT

Researchers from the University of Wisconsin and Stanford University conducted a study as part of the Madison National Center on Effective Secondary Schools. Based on findings from their study and on other research, this publication provides the following 10 tips addressed directly to parents and administrators desiring to help teenagers meet the challenges of high school and beyond. First, recognize that transitions (from middle school to high school and from high school to work or college) can be tough. Second, give high schoolers room to stretch and manage their growing physical, mental, and social maturity. Third, guide teens' actions through setting a good example. Fourth, discipline teens with choices and consequences, not demands and punishments. Fifth, be consistent by making the consequences for a particular action the same each time the action occurs. Sixth, know where students are after school, even if the parent and/or administrator cannot be there. Seventh, use praise rather than presents to reward good grades and good behavior. Eighth, attend school functions; the more involved parents are in the school, the better students do academically. Ninth, parents must keep in touch with their teenagers and encourage discussion about their experiences, opinions, and feelings. Finally, Keep in touch with other parents. When neighborhoods or communities share a common set of expectations for teenage behavior, life is much easier for everyone. (Five references) (MLH)

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Tips for Principals *from NASSP* May 1990

How To Help Students Succeed In School—Beyond the Academics

Parents often wonder what they can do to help their teenagers successfully meet the challenges of secondary school.

Researchers from the University of Wisconsin and Stanford University conducted a study as part of the Madison National Center on Effective Secondary Schools. Based on findings from their study and other research, here are 10 tips for parents and administrators who want to help teenagers meet the challenges of high school and beyond.

1. Recognize that transitions are tough. The first year of high school can be a difficult and stressful year. The work is harder, expectations are higher, and pressure for good grades is stronger. What's more, students must adjust to new faces and a new social system.

In the April 1987 *Schools in the Middle*, Edward N. Brazee suggests that parents be included in orientation sessions for high school freshmen, and that parent/student/teacher conferences be held early in the freshman year.

"Some students may not be ready to adjust to the more rigid academic structure of the high school," Brazee writes. "Others may have some difficulty with the self-discipline needed to operate independently. Parents generally become more vocal because they know exactly what they want their sons and daughters to get from high school."

At the other end, seniors must be prepared to leave the familiar routine of high school and venture into a new situation: establish a reputation, make new friends, and cope with the often unpredictable demands of the world beyond high school. By simply acknowledging how difficult these tasks are, parents and administrators can help students manage successfully.

2. Let them stretch. High schoolers grow rapidly in physical, mental, and social maturity. They must try out and learn to manage these new abilities. Parents can assist by:

- Letting their child express opinions in family discussions—and taking their opinions seriously
- Encouraging students' efforts to try out new activities—especially ones that parents haven't selected for them
- Giving them room to fail as well as room to succeed at something.

Administrators can help by encouraging students to get involved in cocurricular activities and by asking them for input about school issues and concerns.

3. Guide through example. In high school, students grow sophisticated enough intellectually to recognize and resent contradictions between what you say and what you do. Telling students it is important to study and learn is more effective if, after saying it, parents sit down to read a good book rather than sit down and watch television. Administrators guide through example by respecting other people, property, and opinions.

4. Discipline with choices and consequences, not demands and punishments. By saying "This is the rule, period," parents—and educators—give students the subtle message: "I don't think you are able to make good decisions." An alternative is to offer choices and consequences. For example, "You may do this or you may do that, but if you do that, please understand that the consequences will be . . . ."

Students whose parents use this strategy tend to have better grades, higher self-esteem, and closer relationships with their family.

This atmosphere should be established in the school also. Grossnickle and Sesko (1985) suggest that students should learn in a democratic environment that focuses on positive behavior and helps students build self-confidence and self-worth.

5. Be consistent. No matter what discipline style parents and administrators use, it is more effective when it is consistent. Try to make the consequences for a particular action the same each time it occurs. And, try to ensure that each parent—and each educator—disciplines in the same fashion. In this study, students raised in households with this sort of consistency developed a stronger sense of self-discipline.

6. Knowing where beats being there. Working mothers often feel guilty if they cannot be there when their children are due home from school. The study results indicate that school grades and levels of misbehavior are not affected by whether or not a parent is home when the teenager finishes school for the day. However, knowing where the student is does make a difference. Grades were significantly higher and problem behavior was less frequent among students whose parents monitored their

whereabouts after school.

7. Praise works better than presents. Some parents respond to good grades with concrete rewards: money, car use, etc. They take these presents away if grades fall. Others raise expectations and challenge their students to do even better. Curiously, the study indicated that these strategies tended to drive grades downward.

The most effective strategies were to respond to good grades with praise and respond to poor grades with simple words of encouragement or offers to provide help (a tutor, for example).

However, in *Helping Your Kid Make the Grade*, Sandy Dornbusch (1986) warns that ". . . the only failure of this approach comes when student grades are very low to begin with. For really poor performance, no parental response seems to make much difference. Here parents should seek out a sympathetic teacher, counselor, or administrator to develop a school-family partnership."

8. Attend school functions. The more frequently parents were involved in the school, the better their students did academically. Students seem to appreciate the interest parents show by attending back to school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and cocurricular events—especially ones in which the student is involved.

Attending these functions also puts parents in a better position to be able to talk about school with their child, to spot difficulties their child is having, and to suggest strategies for overcoming difficulties.

Administrators should invite parents to visit school *any time*—not just on special occasions. Dornbusch suggests that educators make it easier for parents, especially single parents, to attend school funct.ions. For example, PTA meeting times could be held at night and child care could be provided.

9. Keep in touch with your teen. These days, teens and parents are often so busy that they hardly see each other. But young people benefit enormously from opportunities to talk with a parent about their experiences, opinions, and feelings. This is not a time for parents to lecture, offer advice, or remind about rules. It is a time to listen intently to what's going on in their child's life.

10. Keep in touch with other parents. When neighborhoods or communities share a common set of expectations for teenage behavior, life is much easier for parents and for teenagers. Networking with other parents is a good vehicle for establishing shared expectations and for learning how other parents handle common situations. School administrators can help set up parent networks.

Bruce A. Baldwin, in *The Hidden Curriculum of Success* (1988), concludes: "As a way to keep your child's education at home and at school in clear perspective, keep in the forefront of your mind 'goodness of fit.' This requires that you use as a framework for assessing your child's educational progress the expectations of the marketplace and life in general."

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Teaching Social Skills

"A person's success depends in large part on social skills. Most people succeed because of their ability to get along with their parents, teachers, employers, and peers," according to Constance Jacobs Kain, John C. Downs, and Donald D. Black in "Social Skills in the School Curriculum: A Systematic Approach," published in the January 1988 *NASSP Bulletin.*

The authors contend that in addition to academics, young people must have the social skills necessary to cope in a competitive and demanding world. They suggest that the following are essential tools for successful social interaction: how to follow instructions; how to accept criticism or a consequence; how to accept "no" for an answer; how to disagree appropriately; how to greet someone; how to make a request; how to get someone's attention.

"It is not enough for tomorrow's adults to be academically adept; they must also be able to handle new environments, new schools, and new jobs,' they say. Parents and educators can work together toward this goal.

Tips for Principals *is a bimonthly publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091. John A. Lammel, President; Timothy J. Dyer, Executive Director; Thomas F. Koerner, Director of Publications; Carol Bruce, Associate Director; Patricia Lucas George, Editor; Jody Guarino, Publications Specialist.*